WHILE THE RIVER WAS HIGH

The sun stood over the sacred silk-cotton tree toward the Gankwe side of the land. Across the path leading from somewhere in the back of our shelter the parasol ants, each with its strip of green many times its size, made their way toward an unknown spot where no shelter stood, and no one trod. Like a wave the wide ribbon of green rose and fell as it crossed the ridges of the pathway. In unending numbers they came, and the lizards darting in and out of the brush swerved in the direction of the shelter to avoid the marching line, so that at our feet things moved now up, now back again.

While the men were at the landing place, one of the women who was drying rice on the high flat rocks opposite our shelter paddled over in her boat, and, passing the men with a formal greeting, walked on and stopped to talk with us. She was not a young woman. Her time for childbearing was long over, her wrinkled breasts sagged almost to her waist. The cicatrized designs which once had stood out so clearly, and in her youth had been so valued, were but faintly penciled on her face and about her breasts. Had she cared, she might have reopened the cuts, might have had ashes rubbed into them to make the keloids stand out black and alive against the dark brown of her skin. But what need had a woman her age to care? What need to urge life into symbols of fertility on face and between breasts and about her navel, when her time for fruitfulness was over? Of what use to reanimate the incised scrolls between her thighs, when the legend they told in terms of reproduction was for her a dead legend?

She came toward us slowly, balancing a bottle on her head. A faded cloth covered her from waist to knee, and at her waist a bit of the kerchief necessary to the attire of the married woman, even at work, could be seen. She wore a few beads on a cord about her neck, but she had no other ornaments, for ornaments were for festive occasions, and the cloth tied about the neck and worn cape fashion was for women who had children to carry straddling their backs, and woven garters below the knee were conceits of the young.

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SRB Bush Negroes SRB
Saramacca

THE PROVISION GROUND

It is told that this practice of isolating the provision ground was a heritage of the days when the ancestors were escaping from slavery, for then the whites were at war with them, and villages had often to be deserted. But to desert a village was one thing. What local spirits were there could be urged by the proper magical invocations to follow to another site. Men did not, after all, derive their food supply from a village. It was the provision ground upon which life depended. The provision ground had at all costs to be saved. Access to it was, therefore, made difficult. Trails were never clearly marked, and were often marked to mislead the invading enemy. The river bank was allowed to give no hint of shielding, behind the thicket, a clearing where crops grew to feed the warriors and their families. When a village was destroyed by the enemy, the Bush Negroes fell back on their fields and maintained life. To this day, it is said, this practice holds, for though hostilities ended more than a hundred years ago, the planting grounds are rarely found close to a village.

Walking behind Kasanya in the darkness which gave to each down-hanging vine the outlines of the great aboma snake, held sacred in this bush, we fell to wondering whether in this, as in so many instances, the accounting for current beliefs, in terms of the experience of slavery alone, would prove inadequate.

"We have arrived, Bak'a," said Kasanya, interrupting our speculations. His eyes were sharper than ours, for not even when he spoke did we see the widening of the path and the clearing beyond. Yet fewer than a hundred additional paces found us facing four small huts scattered about a sandy open place, and a woman who was on her way from one house to another turned toward us. She listened to what Kasanya said, with her head slightly averted, pulling at her pipe all the while.

"Ai, they can stay," she said, pointing to the largest of the four houses. "As many of you as can, sleep there. The house next to it is for provisions. We have not much to offer here."

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

village. A household was not confined to one building only, but few who were not men of rank and means had more than three. One was for the woman and her children, another for storing the crops, and the third was the man's treasure house, where women might not come. It was like the matter of wives. Only men of position could afford more than one. But if a man had two wives and both lived in his village, then perhaps five huts would bear a design identified with him on the carved side posts which outlined the low doorway. This design would recur in the various carvings he had made for his women—it was his crest. And though a man from another village, who was not related to him, might like it, and liking it copy it, this practice would be socially frowned upon.

A village quarter, however, did not contain only dwelling places, and storehouses, and men's treasure houses. Certain families also had in their part of the village an enclosed shrine for the family gods. If in a given family a powerful Vodu, or snake god, had come to an ancestress and had in a dream, or in a seizure, or through a revelation made to an obia man, chosen her as his *'asi*—his priestess or medium—then with this disclosure came the instructions for the place of locating a house of worship to that Vodu, and the type of house it was to be. Such a shrine, once erected, would be kept in the quarter, and worshiped by the members of that family. Sometimes in front of a dwelling hut, a low enclosure, the size of a small kennel, would stand a little to the side of the door. This was a house to Toné, the river spirit. In one such house lived a woman who had a great Toné god. She had the gift of prophecy. When the men gathered for a council meeting in the village of the Granman, then she, too, would sometimes be bidden to come and sit with the men, though, being a woman, she could never speak at council meetings.

"Touch her skin," the other women said, pointing out this albino woman, "and you will have your desires fulfilled."

In each quarter, too, there was an open house where the women did their cooking, and perhaps a platform or two,

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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where, in the proper season, maripa nuts and rice were dried.

One quarter differed very little from another, except that in one there might grow the plant which yielded the red and black beans used for the sacred rattles, and for playing the game of adji, which entertained the spirit of the dead while the body lay in state. Instead of a house to the family gods, there might be found a mound of earth in front of one doorway, with an axe-head lying upon it as a shrine for a man's spirit, or a low forked stick sunk into the ground, holding a pot with water and weeds in it for the curing powers of its obia.

A village of any size had also a quarter in which stood the communal buildings. The council house which might also serve on occasion as the house for the dead was there. The menstrual house for the women, a small building which was recognized by a broken calabash, or a porcelain pot brought from the white man's city, lying outside the entrance, stood a little to the side. The Kromanti house, and perhaps an enclosed shelter for the bush gods who shared the shrine with the snake deities, was also located somewhere near the open communal shrine. A village wherein lived the clan head contained in addition a house for the ancestral spirits of the clan. This was called a *Fa'aka-pau wosu*, literally a flagpole house, a euphemism for the shrine to the ancestors for whom white cotton was put up on sticks. In this Fa'aka-pau wosu prayers were offered up for all the important ventures of the clan, and in time of stress a priest would come there with sacrifices, to bid one of the ancestors to enter his body and give him sight. When seizure came on, such a priest prophesied. Sometimes the ancestors were consulted in the same manner as that in which the will of the dead was ascertained. Men would take up a sacred plank and carry it in a state of possession; the elders would put questions to the ancestor who had been called. The answers were construed as favorable or unfavorable according to the way the plank tipped.

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

shot enters the rubber but does not pierce it through. Little dents indicate where the shot is buried inside. With a pistol, however, the result is different. A bullet from a .38 calibre revolver goes clean through. After we have fired, a Negro detaches himself from the group and disappears in the bush. In twenty minutes he is back, bringing the bullet from the revolver. He had traced its course by broken twigs and clipped branches, and finally dug it out of the side of a tree with his bush-knife—on the whole an extraordinary bit of woodcraft.

It is disgusting to find that we have to sleep overnight in this camp. The white man is thoroughly exhausted, able only to drop down on a log while the Negroes make camp. The bahkra's hammock is slung and a fire started. Monkey meat is the *pièce de résistance* of the evening meal.

The monkey is not skinned; only the hair is scraped off. Monkey skin is a jungle delicacy, but there is a humanly cadaverous look to the depilated body. Half of the meat is cut up and dumped into the stew pot together with rice and salt. The other half is smoked liberally to preserve it for the morrow.

Not in the mood to take food which his stomach might reject, the bahkra dines on a can of salmon, with rice and tea on the side. The sun has hardly set when he falls gratefully into the hammock and ties the mosquito netting in place, ready for profound slumber.

He soon finds that sleep is out of the question. The Bush Negroes are sitting about the campfire swapping tales of

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hunts among the Djukas occur when a tapir is sighted near the village; in which case all will go out and endeavour to surround it, and share equally in the kill. When, in dry seasons, *pingos* (bush hogs) swim the river in herds, the Bush Negroes take every available corial and paddle after them, cutting their throats, knocking them on the head, or drowning them by holding their heads under water. The result is a feast, and the excess meat is smoked.

Djukas have also been known to leap from their canoes upon the backs of deer swimming the river, and thus to drown them.

Game that hears us first is gone. A herd of peccaries ahead of us hears the approach; there is a loud crash as they retreat back into the high bush. The Negro tracker finds the trail and we beat around after them for hours, but the animals have outwitted us and cannot be located.

At the end of the day the other hunters return, one of them bringing in a small anteater and a red howling monkey, while the other carries two agouti. Our own success consists of one *powese* (bush turkey) and a small armadillo, the *capusee*. These are cleaned and smoked, and camp is made for the night.

About dusk one of the men goes into the jungle. Less than fifteen minutes later we hear the distant detonation of both barrels, followed by loud yells. Instantly everyone grabs for firearms and begins running in that direction, stumbling and sliding in the jungle evening. The Bush Negroes make their way with marvellous rapidity through the moonless dusk,

354 /9 cont./
[372] they do not like to be without it; at least they do not like to
[353] sleep without a fire. Their weapons hang above their sleeping
[513] place, which is a hammock, in which man and wife sometimes lie
together. Rarely do more than one man and one woman with their
342 small children live in a single hut.

296 Their articles of clothing, as well as other small belongings,
• 251 are kept in pagalen, a kind of plaited basketwork, while they keep
415 water, strong drinks, sugar juice, rice, salt, and so forth in
824 calabashes and godos (2).

2. Both hollowed-out fruit rinds of the Crescentia cagete L. and the Cucurbita lagenaria L., plants from the family of the Cucurbitaceae.

415 Some of them have cedarwood clothes-chests, which must be specially mounted with a great deal of copper; one also sometimes finds liqueur cellars with gilded bottles.

353 For the rest everything is left out in the open in the hut.

264 Often many men come together in one hut for their meals and eat out of one large bowl or calabash. The women withdraw after having placed on very low tables several calabashes or bowls of food for their husbands in the circle in which they are seated, never forgetting to add a large calabash with clean water for washing the hands before and after the meal. The women gather in another hut in order to consume what they kept out for themselves beforehand and what has been left by their husbands.

[888] If an aged person or a highly placed person is in their midst,
[554] he is offered the calabash of food first, so that he may take from it what he wants and eat it by himself from an ordinary plate, although seated in the circle, /10/ while the others partake of their meal from the large bowl. In general they talk with one another during the meal, the highly placed person also taking part in the conversation.

/145 cont./
252 with the matapi (2) and subsequently baked on the baking plate (pan),

2. matapi = long tube of plaiting with which one expresses the juice and the water out of the grated cassava.

during which the granular mass is constantly stirred. The kwak [251] ultimately consists of dry yellow grains. One can keep kwak in good condition longer than bread. It is softened with water and eaten with some sugar (if available).

A less-used product is "afringi." For this one grates freshly peeled cassava, then expresses the grated cassava in the matapi, and dries the meal on the fire or in the sun. Subsequently one pounds this meal in the matta (3) and then kneads it with water

3. matta = large wooden mortar.

into little balls. These are boiled together with fish or meat into a soup. One calls this soup "afringi," which literally means "to throw," presumably because one throws the little balls into the pot. The same product is called "apitie" on the Surinam River.

244 Sweet cassava (kasàba-swieti) is little planted; the tubers are [262] harvested after three months and eaten boiled.

[252] The most important pests in the cassava are: leaf-cutting [825] ants, which cut off the leaves; deer, which eat the young tips and also bite off the stalks; tapirs, which consume the stalks and leaves and also trample many; koni-konis (4), which dig

4. koni-koni = Surinam rabbit.

out and gnaw the tubers; pingos and pakieras (5), which root the

5. pingo and pakiera = wild pigs.

tubers out of the ground and consume them.

/145 cont./

243 Rice (alésie).

Next to cassava rice is an important auxiliary crop. One sows the rice broadcast with the hand among the other crops and tjaps (6) the seed under lightly. The sowing time falls in Decem-

6. To tjap = to loosen the ground with a hoe.

ber to February or March. In the fourth month the rice is mature.
[132] The harvest time therefore falls in the long rainy season from May to July (somewhat later on the Surinam River). Only the ears are cut off, and these are dried in the sun on the grounds or in the villages. Only dry-land rice is cultivated but in many varieties, such as:

kasiwini, the best kind, with long white grains;
ajengena, with short fine grains, with pounding produces a beautiful white rice;
abalahede, with flat, round grain;
witti-alesie or paramakka-alesie, slightly colored in the ear;
lebi (redi) -- alesie, yellow as paddy, grows also in swampy places;
aloeloe or loeloe, sends out shoots quickly, has a good grain;
pindé-alesie, grain speckled on the outside;
asinkini, variety with long grain, is often planted.

/146/ Still other varieties are: rexora, saka, mabosoe, mooidà, sika-sirie, bakaté-saka, dendelei, mooimasra, wittifang, skati, blakatère, mesiti, pikienloeloe, trampoeloekoe.

●[251] The Bush Negroes store the rice in the ears and thresh the paddy with the feet by treading on it after it has been dried on
252 zinc sheets or on sacks. The paddy is pounded in the matta whenever it is needed for a meal. Unpolished silver-pellicle rice /zilvervlies-rijst/ is thus eaten, and this is boiled in the usual
262 manner together with meat or fish. With a good harvest one has rice throughout the year until the following harvest, but frequently
[439] the quantity is sufficient for only a few months. In case of a shortage milled rice is purchased from the shops along the Marowijne.

692 685 [224] /75 cont./ The Djuka had killed the tapir which had sunk. Pressed for time, he had had to leave, requesting the Asisi people to look for it.

[251] [262] The next day Pototo and Amusupé found the animal floating between two waters. They hid it in the bush and had it smoke-dried on their own behalf. They ate it with their wives (about 100 kilos of meat).

That ended up by becoming known, and a jealous man denounced them to the grand man.

Called before the lânti kuutu, they had to apologize and were each sentenced to pay as a fine to the grand man a demijohn of 15 liters of tafia (worth about 6,000 francs) within four months.

[735] Both of them were at a loss to pay this fine, belonging to the category of ne'er-do-wells who have no regular activity and live from day to day, selling some fish or game from time to time.

[613] Amusupé appealed to Captain Konduku, head of his lineage, who agreed to pay for the tafia for him, Amusupé reimbursing him little by little.

[613] [689] As for Pototo, the head of his lineage refused categorically to help him because he had eaten the maïpouri alone without allowing his family to share it (the village people would have found it normal to profit by the crime, but they deemed it immoral that

[123] one of their relatives had deprived them of meat). After three and a half months, Pototo began to occupy himself seriously at a paid job which he had the luck to find because we needed a bossman for two weeks.

577 626 [522] The Boni did nothing but laugh while telling us this story. Affairs of this kind, which do not involve any suprahuman intervention, escape in large measure their social morality; they have a certain feeling for what should be done, but submit to it only in proportion as they fear a material and immediate sanction.

765 /182 cont./
(which is the case here), they wait still longer in order to be able to group the lifting of mourning for several dead people from the same village in a single ceremony. The unfolding of the rites shows that much more importance is attached to Béniti than to the two young boys; in fact, the ceremony is devoted almost exclusively to her.

765 [62] 613 [829] The mourning-lifting ceremonies in Boniville are particularly interesting, for this village includes members of five different lineages. The distribution of functions and duties allows one to better understand the thought of the Boni relative to social organization; the principle of residence plays the determining role. The ceremony takes place in the village where the dead people lived, whatever their lineage was. The burden of organization is divided up about equally among all the inhabitants of the village. The /183/ members of the lineages of the dead people living in other villages are present at the ceremony, but their contribution is much less important.

765 [251] On November 8 (day called busimã kɔm) at noon, the festival begins with the arrival of the buchiman who, the week before, had caught and dried fish for the festival.

The buchiman are put under the authority of ∠Tofioto (K). They are all volunteers (one who would excuse himself from rendering this service would lay himself open to being abandoned alone on the day when he would have to bear the weight of mourning for one of his near relatives). The main weight of mourning is borne by Boniville village. The people of the principal fraction of the Dju (Asisi village) furnish a rather large contribution as regards time spent fishing but symbolic as to the furnishing of tafia and imported foods.

226 [251] 621 13 These buchiman had been at work since October 25, catching and salting fish:

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/183 cont./

	for Boniville	for Asisi-Dju
Fintiman Kiémenti Doni Alibi	sons and grandsons of Béniti (Dju)	3 men over 20 years old
4 young men of the Kotika lineage		4 to 5 adolescents
1 —	Dip. I —	
2 —	Lapé —	
1 —	Papaïston —	
2 —	Poti —	

They furnished a total of two weeks of work but each one collected for himself about 15 kilograms of dry fish.

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The buchiman, riding in five large canoes decorated with multicolored oriflammes, approach the Boniville wharf where all the young people of the village are massed, the men armed with their guns, the women brandishing banners made of brand-new camisas. The hurrahs resound, punctuated by hundreds of shots. In an atmosphere of enthusiasm the buchiman make their entrance into the village and go to report on their mission to the council assembled under the mortuary shed. According to custom, this council is improvised at the last moment by the elders who are there, without attention to origin, and does not involve any definite authority.

Four baskets of dried fish are put down at the edge of the shed, for the mourning-lifting festival, then each one goes to get and arrange in his house a big personal basketful.

The fish intended for the festival are distributed among the women charged with preparing them.

About 2:00 P.M. the elders are assembled in the western part of the shed; in the eastern part, the near relatives of the dead for whom mourning will be lifted lament.

Several apinti drums are brought and placed laterally.